

Should We Keep Sinning So Grace Increases?

Romans 6:1-23

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Holding seemingly competing ideas in tension is difficult. We view things as either right or wrong or black or white. We struggle with gray. Nuance is hard for us. This tug of war between law and works on one side and grace and faith on the other is clearly seen in the New Testament

The Jewish people struggled to incorporate grace into their understanding of Law. It's true that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament as a God of grace and mercy and love, but the Law God gave to the Israelites through Moses cast such a long shadow, that grace was often obscured. God's people devoted their lives to the Law—striving to do what God commanded and refraining from doing what God forbade. It was difficult, if not impossible, to focus on doing what the Law commanded while simultaneously understanding and receiving God's grace.

Accepting God's grace, while trying to fulfill the obligations of the Law wasn't just a Jewish problem; it's a human struggle. How do my role and God's role relate? What is God responsible for and what's my responsibility? Where does faith and grace end, and my responsibility begin?

Followers of Jesus in every church Paul planted struggled with questions like those about faith and works and about grace and keeping the Law, and you and I continue to struggle with those questions today. In Romans chapter 6 Paul continues his letter to the Romans with these words...

Romans 6:1-23

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul packs a lot into those verses, and I want to help us unpack what he writes by exploring three analogies he uses to debunk the idea that we should keep on sinning, so more of God's grace is poured onto us. **First, Paul says we shouldn't keep on sinning because we died to sin and have been resurrected with Christ.**

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land!

That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we

can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. (Romans 6:1-5 The MESSAGE)

Paul says that before we knew Jesus and placed our faith in Him we were dead because of sin. That death is symbolized in baptism as we go under the water—just like Jesus was placed in a tomb, possibly under the ground. But when we place our faith in Jesus, He gives us new life, and that's symbolized in baptism as we come up out of the water, just as Jesus was resurrected by God from death and left the grave. In the verses that were just read Paul makes the point that after we come into a relationship with Jesus we can't intentionally keep on sinning because we've died to sin and are alive in Christ.

The second reason Paul gives for why we can't keep on sinning is found in verses 12-14 where **Paul says our bodies are now instruments or tools for God to use for good, instead of tools for Satan to use for evil.** Listen to verses 12-14...

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. Romans 6:12-14

When you and I make the decision to place our faith in Jesus and follow Him, our bodies, which had been tools for the enemy to use for his purposes, are now repurposed as tools for God that He uses to accomplish his plans. When we begin to follow Jesus, our countenance might change from sadness or anger to joy, but we're still the same person. It's just that now we're serving Jesus, whereas before we were serving Satan—whether we intended to or not.

Take this axe as an example. This axe can be used as a tool for wickedness. I could destroy a car; tear down a building; or, even seriously injure someone. But I have this axe for good purposes. I chop up firewood with it and I pound in stakes for my tomato plants with it. It can be used for wicked purposes, but I choose to use it for good. Here's what Paul says about being a tool for God in another place. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10 he writes, *"For we are God's handiwork (another way that word is translated is masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* Every person who ever lived was created by God to work for God in a way that He designed even before that

person was born. That's true whether we place our faith in Jesus or not, but we only fulfill the purpose that God had in mind for us, when we give ourselves to Him. When we enter a relationship with Jesus our body becomes a tool for God to use for good, rather than a tool that's used for wicked or evil purposes.

To recap, Paul says when we place our faith in Jesus, we can't keep on sinning, first, because we've died to sin and second, because our bodies are now tools for God's purposes, rather than tools for evil. **The third reason Paul gives in chapter 6 for why we can't keep on intentionally sinning is that whereas before we were in slavery to sin, now we're slaves to God.** Listen again to Romans 6:15-23:

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

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²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:15-23

Before we knew Jesus, we were in slavery to sin, but when we placed our faith in Christ, we're now slaves to God. Slavery has very negative connotations for us and rightly so. When we think of slavery in America, we immediately think of African Americans who were enslaved by European Americans in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. People weren't designed by God to be enslaved to other people. Paul's point here and a point that Jesus makes on several occasions in the gospels is that we're all slaves to something or someone—we all serve some master. If we're slaves to sin, that means we're controlled by it. One of the clearest pictures of being enslaved to sin is an addiction to drugs. People addicted to narcotics will do anything to fill their craving—they'll steal to get money, they'll mistreat people they love, they'll even sometimes kill

others to get what their body craves. They're slaves to drugs. Addiction to drugs is an obvious and extreme example, but we can be enslaved to sin in many other ways: money, fame, pleasure, sex, food and the list goes on.

When we place our faith in Jesus and follow Him, we exchange slavery to sin for slavery to God. The concept of slavery isn't a positive one for us, but when Jesus becomes our master, we're controlled by our desire to please and obey Him, rather than being controlled by an addiction to sin. Giving ourselves to our master, Jesus, a slave results in righteousness, holiness and ultimately, life.

Why shouldn't we intentionally sin so that more of God's grace is released to us? Paul gives three reasons: We've died to sin and have been raised to life in Christ. We've offered ourselves to God as instruments or tools of righteousness, rather than as tools to sin. And, God, rather than sin, is our new master.

And Paul summarizes all of what he's said with the well-known statement in verse 23, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23) We shouldn't sin, because the wages—the result—of sin is death. Sin has consequences. While God's grace covers us and frees us from sin, we live with the results of sin. Earlier I built on Paul's analogy of baptism by demonstrating a baptism. One of the best examples I've ever heard about God's grace protecting us from the consequences of sin came during a baptism service. Some of you know the name, Greg Motter. Greg was part of McBIC's At The Cross Recovery Ministry for a number of years and he had experienced God's deliverance from a life in which he was enslaved to alcoholism and drug abuse. Greg had been baptized and had shared his testimony of deliverance with our church family. Some time later he was at a baptism service—I believe on an Easter Sunday—and following the service he had tears in his eyes as he told Pastor John King how much it meant to him to hear children and young teens share their faith in Jesus and take the step of publicly professing their faith through baptism. Greg said something like, *"I've experienced a dramatic conversion as God delivered me from a life of drugs, alcohol and brokenness in so many areas of my life,"* but he said, *as I watched those children talk about their faith in Jesus it overwhelmed me to think about how much Jesus was saving them from, but them committing their lives to him at such a young age."* Greg Motter

experienced Jesus' grace in a powerful and radical way, but he understood that his sin had consequences. He was overjoyed that Easter morning, thinking about how much the children and teens who were being baptized were being saved from not having to go through much of their lives enslaved to sin.

To those who have never taken the step of placing their faith in Jesus, I encourage you to take that step today by talking and praying with a friend or with one of our pastoral staff. No matter who you are, what you've done or what you're currently doing, God's grace is available to you through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Today would be a great day to place your faith in Him—switching your allegiance from sin as your master to serving Jesus as your master. And to those who have placed their faith in Jesus, I want to remind you that it's God's grace extended to you through faith in Jesus that makes you righteous before God, not your striving to be good or do right. The Law and seeking to fulfill the Law leads to death, but life comes as you place your faith in Jesus and receive his grace. As Paul says in Romans 3:23 and 24: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* Romans 3:23 & 24